

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES
November-December 1989

Africa

Angola

In November, the ICRC completed its seed distributions to civilians affected by the conflict on the Angolan Planalto. During the operation, which started at the end of September, delegates distributed over 1,000 tonnes of seed to about 120,000 families in the provinces of Benguela, Bié and Huambo, where the conflict had seriously disturbed the normal crop cycle. ICRC teams conducted regular nutritional surveys which revealed a particularly high incidence of malnutrition, resulting from drought and the continuing conflict. To remedy the situation, the ICRC started to distribute food rations as early as October, along with the seed. Food distributions were stepped up in November and in December, reaching a total of about 65,000 people at the end of the year.

A prisoner of war of Namibian origin, whom the ICRC had visited several times in Luanda, was released and handed over to the ICRC by the Angolan authorities on 27 November. The ICRC organized his repatriation. He was handed over to the South African authorities in Johannesburg, then accompanied by the ICRC delegation in Windhoek to his home in Namibia.

Somalia

During the reporting period, ICRC activities in north-western Somalia expanded. The ICRC surgical hospital in Berbera, opened in mid-August, admitted a steadily growing number of patients, up to 25 per week in December. The wounded came either from Berbera itself or were flown in by the ICRC from other towns in the north-west. In addition, following the surveys of medical facilities conducted throughout the year, the delegates started an assistance programme for the civilian hospitals of Boroma, Burao, Hargeisa and Las Anod on

4 November. The hospitals are receiving food, medical equipment, medicines and blankets.

Uganda

In mid-December, the new Deputy Minister of Defence informed the ICRC delegation in Kampala of the Ugandan authorities' decision to allow the ICRC to resume visits to military barracks being used as temporary places of detention. In the past, the ICRC had twice had access to these barracks, but the visits were interrupted in March 1989. Moreover, during the reporting period the delegates finished the fourth series of visits to civilian prisons in which security prisoners are held under the authority of the armed forces.

The delegates also continued material and food assistance programmes for vulnerable groups (displaced persons, seriously malnourished children, etc.) in the Gulu and Soroti districts. Medical teams, in addition to their usual work (consultations, medical evacuation), vaccinated numerous women of child-bearing age and children in remote villages.

Sudan

On 3 November, contending that deteriorating security conditions were a direct threat to the flights of humanitarian organizations working in Sudan, the Khartoum government decided to close Sudanese air space. As the closure continued, preventing the ICRC from conducting its activities for the victims, the institution made a series of representations to the Sudanese government, reminding it of the ICRC's specific mandate in an attempt to obtain authorization to make emergency flights and thereby evacuate the wounded, replenish stocks of medicines and other relief supplies and replace expatriate personnel stranded in the field. This authorization had still not been received by the end of 1989.

Despite the ban on flights, the ICRC continued all its assistance activities for vulnerable groups in the government towns of Juba, Wau and Malakal, where it had sufficient stocks. However, ICRC staff in areas under SPLA control, who were completely isolated, were not able to continue all the programmes they had undertaken because they were not receiving regular supplies. Only a few of the medical programmes were maintained on a very irregular basis.

In December, delegates based in Juba visited five SPLA combatants held in an army prison. The previous visit to these persons had taken place in August.

In a tragic incident, an airplane from *Médecins sans Frontières/Aviation sans Frontières* (MSF/ASF) was shot down on 21 December shortly after take-off from Aweil. The four passengers and crew were killed. After obtaining reliable safety guarantees from both parties, the ICRC evacuated the mortal remains of the four passengers and crew to Khartoum, as well as the expatriate MSF staff and the ICRC nurse still in Aweil.

Latin America

El Salvador

On 11 November, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) launched its heaviest offensive since the conflict started in 1980 against the country's towns, especially the capital. Eight of fourteen departments were affected and President Christiani declared a state of emergency on 12 November. From the outset, the ICRC delegation concentrated on emergency needs resulting from the fighting, doing its utmost to obtain a truce so that combat areas could be reached and the victims assisted.

The fighting was so intense that Salvadoran Red Cross employees often could not get through to the wounded, some of whom died before help arrived.

After three days of violence with a state of emergency and a curfew, the ICRC launched an appeal in Geneva for an immediate truce so that Red Cross teams could evacuate the wounded from combat areas to hospitals in the capital. The appeal remained unheard, and the fighting continued. Two days later, the ICRC again asked all the parties to respect the rules of international humanitarian law. It reminded them in particular that they were duty bound to spare civilians and allow medical personnel, ambulances and hospitals to work without hindrance.

When the fighting first broke out, a Salvadoran Red Cross employee was wounded while assisting the victims. Two ambulances were also destroyed and five others damaged when they were caught in crossfire. The ICRC delegation in San Salvador immediately demanded that the red cross emblem be respected.

In spite of the particularly dangerous conditions, Salvadoran Red Cross employees were able to evacuate over 450 wounded civilians and combatants during the first week of the fighting. The ICRC provided ambulances and additional medical supplies to help the National Society cope with the emergency.

The ICRC delegates closely monitored the situation in the hospitals to which the wounded were admitted. Medical requisites were distributed to hospital facilities in the capital and in San Miguel, 140 km east of San Salvador, where the influx of casualties had rapidly depleted stocks. Over 15 tonnes of additional medical supplies were immediately flown in to meet needs.

Tens of thousands of civilians fled combat areas in San Salvador and San Miguel in search of safer places. By mid-November, the government and the churches had set up over 50 shelters in San Salvador alone, providing refuge to about 17,000 people. ICRC delegates visited the shelters and gave medical assistance when necessary.

Also in San Salvador, on 20 November the ICRC evacuated 17 civilians from the Sheraton Hotel, which had been taken by FMLN guerrillas. The operation was carried out during a one-hour ceasefire negotiated between the parties to the conflict, via the Spanish embassy and a church commission.

ICRC delegates immediately took steps to gain access to the hundreds of people arrested in the aftermath of the events. Following interviews with the country's highest authorities they obtained the same kind of agreement for visits as the ICRC had had during the state of emergency in force from 1982 until January 1987, i.e. access to detainees 8 days after arrest. During the two months covered by this report, the delegates made 311 visits to 63 places of detention and registered 717 persons, 277 of them on their release.

Panama

On 20 December, the United States took military action in Panama. That same day, an ICRC regional delegate based in Costa Rica left San José for Panama, arriving there the following day. Two doctors and the relief co-ordinator from the delegation in Nicaragua joined him on 22 December. At the same time, an offer of services was sent to the United States and to the government of Panama, reminding them of their obligations in a situation of war in which the Geneva Conventions were fully applicable. The ICRC also asked both States to allow it to provide protection and assistance to the civilian victims and prisoners.

The ICRC doctors observed that the Panamanian hospitals, which had admitted 300 war wounded, were sorely in need of medicines; two tonnes of medicines were flown in by two chartered aircraft on 27 December and distributed the next day with the help of the National Society. About 12,000 displaced persons had sought temporary refuge in schools or churches but were not in need of ICRC aid. Generally speaking, the emergency as such ended on 30 December.

The delegates sought to visit persons arrested by the U.S. armed forces. Visits to prisoners of war and civilian victims finally got under way on 30 December in Empire Range camp, in the canal zone. The visits were scheduled to continue in January.

Asia

Afghan conflict

As 1989 came to an end, the ICRC's activities for the victims of the Afghan conflict remained intense. Its hospitals in Peshawar and Quetta (Pakistan) continued to work at maximum capacity. In Afghanistan, it was decided in November to start increasing the capacity of the hospital in Kabul from 150 to 200 beds, after a steady rise in the number of patients over the preceding months. Also in November, the ICRC supplemented its flights from Peshawar to Kabul with weekly flights to Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat (respectively north and west of Kabul), where delegates have been permanently based since August 1989. Besides transporting personnel, these flights enable the ICRC to take medical supplies to both towns and bring amputees to Kabul to be fitted with artificial limbs at the orthopaedic centre. Finally, the number of patients coming for consultation to the dispensary opened by the ICRC in Herat in October increased regularly during the last two months of the year.

A third complete visit to sentenced prisoners in Pul-i-Charki (Kabul) was begun by a team of delegates on 7 November and was continuing at the end of the year. The previous complete visit took place at the end of 1988. At the same time, delegates based in Pakistan continued to go to various Afghan provinces to carry out a number of activities, including visits to detainees held by the opposition.

In Pakistan itself, the ICRC had interviews without witnesses with four Soviet prisoners handed over by the Afghan opposition to the Pakistan authorities in November. During the interviews, two of them expressed the wish to be able to return to their families in the USSR after their release, while the other two opted to stay in Afghanistan. At

the same time, three Afghan prisoners who had just been released from Pul-i-Charki were given the hospitality of the ICRC delegation in Kabul pending an agreement on their transfer to Pakistan. The ICRC, which had informed the various parties of its availability as an intermediary in simultaneous release and transfer operations for these prisoners, was still waiting for an answer at the end of the year.

Sri Lanka

The ICRC delegation opened in Sri Lanka in October, after years of negotiations, rapidly got under way in the following two months. In November an agreement was signed with the authorities allowing the ICRC to visit, in accordance with its customary procedures (interviews without witnesses), all persons held in connection with the disturbances. The same month, a first visit was made to Boossa Army Detention Camp, 15 km from the southern city of Galle. The ICRC registered over 2,300 detainees during the visit. From 4 to 8 December, about 1,300 detainees were visited in Pelawatta Camp, also in the south. Other places of detention were visited in December, in particular temporary places of detention in which people are held immediately after arrest.

Parallel to these visits, the ICRC tracing activities sharply increased. After drawing up lists of the persons visited, it was able to inform their families of their arrest and thereby answer some of the almost 4,000 tracing requests received by 31 December, or pass on messages to them.

The ICRC also checked whether any medical assistance was required as a result of events, but surveys continued in different parts of the island did not reveal a need for ICRC action. The delegation also tried to go to the north and east of the country, where the information at its disposal suggested that needs were substantial, but had not been able to do so by the end of the year.

The ICRC sent a delegate specialized in dissemination to the armed forces to Sri Lanka in November. He organized a programme of seminars on international humanitarian law for various target groups made up of members of the army and police forces. At the end of December, the ICRC delegation in Colombo consisted of 18 expatriates, including one doctor and three nurses.

Cambodian conflict

The ICRC continued its activities for the victims of the conflict in Cambodia, seeking primarily to develop its medical and tracing activities in Cambodia along the same lines as those on the Thai border. After receiving permission in October to work in Battambang, the ICRC

twice sent a team there in December with urgently required medical supplies for the town's hospitals until the ICRC is able to set up a permanent medical facility.

Indonesia

On 31 December the ICRC completed its first series of visits in Irian Jaya, started in September: 84 detainees belonging to the OPM were seen in eight places of detention.

Philippines

In December the ICRC delegation was very active when the attempted coup led to clashes mainly affecting the capital. It maintained regular contact with all the parties involved in the fighting, seeking to ensure that the civilian population was spared in military operations. Several messages were broadcast to this effect, calling also for respect for the red cross emblem after four volunteers from the Philippines National Red Cross (PNRC) were wounded while carrying out their duties.

The ICRC also helped the PNRC to evacuate the wounded by placing three ambulances and six drivers at its disposal. The National Society was very active during the fighting, evacuating 571 wounded and 79 dead, i.e. almost all the victims. Four temporary first-aid posts were set up near the scene of the fighting and the ICRC provided medical equipment and supplies, including blood, to the PNRC and the capital's hospitals. Over 10,000 civilians assembled in evacuation centres outside the area of fighting received medical and food aid.

Middle East

Lebanon

On 6 October unidentified gunmen kidnapped ICRC delegates Emanuel Christen and Elio Erriquez when, as usual, they were on their way to work at the Sidon orthopaedic centre. The ICRC, both in Lebanon and from Geneva, repeatedly approached all factions represented on Lebanese territory and governments with influence in Lebanon. They were unanimous in condemning the kidnapping, which contravenes the most fundamental rules of international humanitarian law; without respect for those rules no humanitarian activity is possible (see *IRRC*, No. 273, November-December 1989, pages 575-576).

Throughout November and December, the ICRC redoubled its efforts to obtain the delegates' release. From 17 to 20 December, the ICRC President was in Lebanon and Syria, where he met the newly appointed President of the Lebanese Republic, Mr. Elias Hrawi, and the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Farouk ash-Shara, and the First Vice-President of the Syrian Arab Republic, M. Abd al-Halim Khaddam (see also above, page 45.)

On 6 December, the ICRC launched another appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of both hostages. At the same time about 25,000 signatures expressing solidarity and disapproval collected in Switzerland were deposited at the orthopaedic centre in Sidon.

In the field, heavy demands were made upon the ICRC as from 23 December, when armed clashes broke out between Amal and Hezbollah in the Iklim-al-Touffah. The institution provided medical facilities in the area—and in Beirut where the wounded were brought—with medicines and dressing material.

The delegation's activities for detainees were also intense during the last three months of the year: 484 detainees were visited and 259 of them newly registered.

Israel and occupied territories

In addition to the ongoing activities of the ICRC delegation, a relief delegate made an assessment of the needs of detainees' families in the occupied territories from 29 November to 2 December. The deteriorating economic situation has affected these families in particular, since in 41% of the cases the detainee is the family breadwinner.

The ICRC reacted to the death under interrogation of a detainee in Gaza prison on 20 December by sending a letter to Mr. Rabin, Israeli Minister of Defence.

Iran/Iraq

In December, the Delegate General for the Middle East went to Tehran and Baghdad; he had talks in each capital with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his staff, and with the military authorities responsible for the prisoners of war. The discussions focused on the repatriation of wounded and sick prisoners and on the other obligations laid down in the Third Convention, namely the registration of prisoners of war, and visits by the ICRC.

In Iraq, ICRC delegates conducted the sixth annual series of visits in December to about 17,000 Iranian prisoners of war.

Europe

Romania

At the end of December, the ICRC organized a large-scale emergency operation to assist the victims of the events which occurred in Romania during the second half of the month.

On 22 December, a few hours after the fall of the Ceaucescu regime, a first ICRC team arrived at Bucharest airport, where it took care of about 300 civilians unable to leave because of the fighting. The delegates treated the wounded and registered the first detainees. The next day, the ICRC broadcast a radio appeal asking all concerned to respect the basic humanitarian principles and the red cross emblem.

The humanitarian response to the events in Romania was tremendous and relief supplies flooded in by land, sea and air. The situation stabilized on 25 December and the ICRC was able to ascertain that the emergency phase was over. About twenty National Societies participated in the Red Cross operation, which was co-ordinated by the ICRC with the co-operation of the Romanian Red Cross and the agreement of the League. The National Societies in the neighbouring countries were especially active. After 25 December, the ICRC attempted to channel the surge of support towards specific aid better matched to the actual humanitarian needs in Romania. To this end it launched an appeal for 18 million Swiss francs.

The kind and amount of relief supplies needed and distribution priorities were determined by a field survey conducted by teams of ICRC and National Society delegates based in Bucharest and along the Bulgarian and Hungarian borders. At the end of the year, 34 ICRC delegates and 28 National Society members were still on the spot, and a large team was co-ordinating activities from ICRC headquarters.
